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Montana State Capitol

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MONTANA STATE CAPITOL

The state capitol grounds consist of twelve and one-half acres on the east side of Helena, facing the north on Sixth Avenue. The background of stately mountains minimizes the size of the building which is 464 feet in length with an average width of 130 feet; a height of 90 feet with a dome rising to 165 feet. The original structure, for which the corner stone was laid July 4, 1899, completed in 1902, is built of Montana sandstone obtained from Columbus, Montana, while the two wings, first occupied in 1912, are faced in native granite obtained near Helena. The dome is copper covered, crowned by the statue of Liberty. The approximate cost of the grounds and building, including paving and furniture in the main building was $1,200,000.00.

At the eastern end of the grounds and to the rear are three smaller buildings, the nearest being the lunch room, used during the Legislative Sessions for the accommodation of the members and visitors. South of this building is the Livestock building, utilized first the early part of 1919. This building was erected at a cost, including laboratory fixtures, of about $40,000.00. Further back towards the mountains, outside the main rectangular grounds, lies the newest overflow building, being that of the State Boardof Health, for which the 1919 Legislature made an appropriation of $50,000.00, and which has since July 1920 been occupied by that Board and allied interests.

Ground Floor

On the ground floor the principal interest to the sightseer is the collection of birds, Indian relics and mining specimens of the Historical Library. These are placed in the main corridors. The Library itself, located in the east wing of the capitol, is rich in historical information of the early days of Montana and happenings of our state, also pictures and many articles of value well worth viewing.

Main Floor

From the center of the main floor rises the dome, richly lighted by stained glass windows and portraying in its four pictures the characteristic types of early days; the Indian - the original settler - the trapper and the miner who led the westward march, and the cowboy. It is interesting to note that the painting of the trapper is a likeness of "Jim" Bridger, a pioneer of the west who is honored also by a portrait in the Colorado capitol, while that of the miner is of Henry Edgar, well known in Montana as an early follower of the "Golden" trail.

On this floor are located the quarters of most of the elective officers, with the Governor's reception room adjoining the Governor's office. The Reception Room, located in the east wing, is most pleasing with its brown and green tones and rich furnishings.

The painting of the "Driving of the Golden Spike" spans the wall at the top of the Grand Stairway. This is in commemmoration of the completion of the Northern Pacific railroad, celebrated on September 8, 1883, at Gold Creek, Montana, on the main line of this road just west of Garrison. The central figure is Gen. U. S. Grant, while at his back stands Governor Crosby, then territorial governor, and Henry Villard, then president of the Northern Pacific. The painting is the work of the well known artist Amedee Joullin of San Francisco.

Third Floor.

At the extreme western end of this floor is the House of Representatives and in this chamber is the painting by Charles M. Russell - the celebrated Montana "cowboy" artist, who died October 24, 1926- portraying the famous meeting of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with the Shoshone Indians in 1805. At the right of the picture will be noticed Lewis and Clark and their small party; Sacajawea, the Shoshone Indian girl who had been stolen by the Mandans and carried to Dakota, and was now guiding those white men into her home country, and York, the first negro ever seen by these Indians. This meeting took place near Armstead, on the south fork of the Bitter Root River and the mountains in the background show the rugged country, hinting of good hunting and fishing, selected by this great Indian tribe - more properly known as the Shoshone tribe - for their camp.

There are larger and more costly capitols than that of our state but few possess the historic interest inspired by the various paintings on its walls, portraying scenes in the early struggles of the territory or state, and beauty spots now to be found within its borders.

The early history of the state is well started with the paintings by Edgar S. Paxson- "a pioneer and a pioneer painter" (at his death in November 1919, a resident of Missoula) - on the walls of the lobby of the House. At the entrance to the left is found " After the Whiteman's Book" showing the eager longing for the Christian teachings by the Flatheads. In 1831 four warriors were dispatched by their tribe to St. Louis to secure the "Whiteman's Book". This expedition met with failure, only one returning, ragged, hungry and heartsick without the coveted learning. Again in 1835 another band started, three Flatheads, a Nex Perce and an Iroquois, but these were killed by hostile Indians and it was not until 1840 that a delegation sent out the previous year, returned with Father DeSmet who brought with him the Book. In the meantime, in 1834, Methodist missionaries learning of the first expedition came west, but were not favorably received by the Flatheads who awaited the coming of a "robe noir" only, and these missionaries went further west finding their teachings more acceptable to other tribes.

The next picture is entitled "The Border Land". Information as th the historical background for this picture is lacking, but may it not be that the Indian has set a boundary beyond which he warns civilizatiob not to intrude, as did the father of Chief Joseph with his Idaho lands; settlers and cultivation on one side of the stream the Indian and his hunting on the other?

In the panel "Lewis and Clark at Three Forks", we see Lewis, Clark, Sacajawea, Charbonneau, the girl's half-breed husband, Colter,the noted guide of other historic moment and York, Clarks negro body servant. On July 25, 1805, Clark who had gone ahead with a scouting party, reachedthe Three Forks of the Missouri. He viewed the country from what is now known as Fort Rock, and proceeded on his way, choosing the north fork, afterwards named by him the Jefferson. The next day he crossed overland to the middle fork, the Madison. He was on this stream when Lewis, coming up with the boats arrived at the Three Forks on the 27th. It will be remembered that Sacajawea had been captured six years previous by the Mandans when hunting near Three Forks, and was taken with other spoils of war down the Yellowstone to the home of the Mandans in Dakota. Coming up the Missouri she at once recognized the country of the Three Forks and showed the spot where she was captured. The artist shows the girl standing with outstretched arm indicating the way the party must go to reach "her" country which is the land where the waters flow into the sunset. One can almost hear her say "Ixie-neahshokup" which Charbonneau interprets "This is my country".

Across the lobby is found "Lewis at Black Eagle Falls". After leaving the Marias River, June 3, 1805, the Lewis and Clark expedition divided into two parties, Lewis with four men traveling far out on the north side of the Missouri and Clark coming up the river with boats. At noon June 13, 1805, Lewis came to the Great Falls of the Missouri. Here the party spent the night. Next morning one man was sent down stream to report the discovery to Capt, Clark, and Capt. Lewis started up the river to ascertain if there were other falls above. His diary tells of each rapids

a pan, is a local miner, Jerry Robinson.

and falls and of his coming at last to the drop known as the Black Eagle Falls. Mr. Paxson's canvas of this historic happening shows Lewis in contemplation on the north bluff above the falls.

"Pierre de la Verendrye" is credited with being the first white man to visit the territory known as Montana, reaching the Big Horn mountains about one hundred miles east of the Yellowstone Park, on New Year's Day, 1743.

"Surrender of Chief Joseph" one of the most touching surrenders ever made. Chief Joseph offthe Nez Perces, after a retreat of over 2,000 miles, resisting efforts of the whitemen to place his tribe on a reservation and give up the land of their fathers, is represented surrendering his gun and his pitiful band of 87 warriors, 40 of whom were wounded, 184 squaws, and 147 children, to General Miles. This retreat started near the present town of Lewiston, Idaho, skirted the Montana-Idaho boundary, crossed the Yellowstone Park, turned northward on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone and ended in the Bear Paw mountains where Joseph had stopped to hunt and fish, having out distanced Gen. Howard who was in pursuit. Joseph was surprised by Gen, Miles who had crossed from Fort Keogh, when he was only a day's march from the Canadian border and across which Sitting Bull with a large force was camped. It is regretted that the Government was so slow in carrying out the terms accorded at the surrender that Joseph's band was nearly gone before they were at last returned to their homes.

Going east on this floor we come to the Senate chambers containing more pictures worthy of attention.

Directly over the President's desk is a painting commemorative of the "Louisiana Purchase" of which Montana is a part. In this picture are grouped the men who participated in this transaction although most of them never met. At the right is seated Napoleon and standing next to him is Marbois, who negotiated the sale on behalf of the French government. At the left is seated Jefferson; next to him stands Livingston, while Monroe is leaning over the table in the center. A map of the territory involved is spread out befpre them. Each member of the group seems impressed with the magniture of a transaction which will transfer from one nation to another a domain rivalling in area the combined possessions of both of the countries over whose destinies they preside.

To the left of the President's desk are pictured two old time settlers after whom two of our counties arenamed. These are Dawson and Chouteau, early fur traders, Dawson standing and Chouteau sitting, with bundles of pelts around them. Old Fort Benton and the Missuri River are shown in the background.

The next panels contains pictures of Lewis and Clark with Sacajawea and York. This picture is a representation of the arrival at Three Forks, after a long and trying winter, Lewis depicted as still clad in his winter furs.

The large panel at the east end of the hall is a painting of "Custer's Last Battle." Custer is the central figure, clad in his buckskin uniform, engagedin struggle with an Indian. To his right kneels Rain-in-the-Face, who is generally charged with having slain Custer, but who in the story of his life, denies this and all knowledge of the warrior who was responsible.

The next panel contains portraits of Fathers De Smet and Ravalli.. Father De Smet established the St. Mary's Mission in 1841 and on his return from Europe in 1845 brought with him Father Ravalli, skilled in medicine and craft work who is responsible for the building of the first grist mill and the first saw mill to be run by water power in this territory. At the left of the picture is an Indian Group, while leaning against Father Ravalli's knee is an Indian child. The background is the old St. Mary's Mission, at Stevensville in the Bitter Root Valley and in the county of Ravalli, named after this pioneer teacher.

The last panel presents a mining scene. The location is Nelson Gulch, on the Rimini road south of Helena, and the picture of the man at the right, leaning over a pan, is a local miner, Jerry Robinson.

Passing on the north side of the balcony of the rotunda is gained a view of the mountains of the Prickly Pear Valley, the Bear Tooth prominent in the middle north and old Baldy about forty miles away to the right.

The Supreme Court opens off of this balcony and here we see above the Judges' desk another picture of the Lewis & Clark expedition, showing Lewis on a rocky point with his telescope raised to catch a view of the distant Rocky Mountains. Away in the distance between its barren banks, winds the Missouri.

The panels at either side of this painting represent events of interest in the formation of the State of Montana. The panel to the right shows President Cleveland about to sign the enabling act providing for the admission of Montana into the sisterhood of states; at his left is Secretary of State Bayard, while in the background stands Governor Toole, at that time delegate in Congress from the Territory of Montana. The other group represents President Harrison in company with Secretary of State Blaine, about to sign the proclamation announcing the admission of Montana to the Union and by that act consummating the conferring of statehood on Montana.

To the left of the rostrum is a painting showing an emigrant train being attacked by the Indians. This was an event too often happening in the early times.

The next panel discloses "The Gate of the Mountains." This is a passage of the Missouri River about twenty miles north of Helena.

"The Chase of the Buffalo" a representation of a hunt which is no more, makes us realize the loss in the wanton destruction of these animals used by the Indians so long for food and dress.

On the right is found "The Last of the Buffalo". In this scene the Indians have slain the last of those mighty herds that once roamed our vast prairies in countless numbers and they are solemnly invoking the Great Manitou for the restoration of the animals that heretofore had furnished them with provision. From a tunnel in the background emerges a railway train, symbolizing the change of civilization which has so suddenly come upon them.

Beyond the judges' chambers lies the Law Library in which are placed ten pictures by Ralph E. De Camp, an artist of note, recognized for his splendid scenic effects. Mr. DeCamp has been a resident of Helena for many years.

The first picture on the east side of the room is "The Bitter Root". It is a scene about 12 miles north of Hamilton, Montana, and shows the Bitter Root river emerging from a fringe of heavy timber and circling broadly through a meadow deep with grass.

The second picture is "Flathead Lake" one of the most beautiful spots in Montana, and the largest body of fresh water west of the Great Lakes. This scene is from the west, about six miles south of Goose Bay.

The third picture "Above Timberline" is a scene near the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park, in the Granite range.

The fourth picture on the east wall is "The West Gallatin" a scene at the mouth of the canyon of the West Gallatin, one of our Montana rivers sending its waters to join with two other rivers to form the mighty Missouri.

On the south end of the room is found "The Gate of the Mountains". When Lewis and Clark toiled a first hard way up the Missouri one of the places their passage made historic was the cleft in the mountain range through which a stream found its tortuous course to the open lands beyond. The explorers named the place "The Gate of the Mountains, and Mr. DeCamp depicts this historic "Gate" as it appears in the glory of an autumn afternoon. The location is about 18 miles north of Helena.

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Next on the west wall is "Last Chance". Under the shadow of Mount Helena, in the gulch from which thirty million dollars of placer gold was taken, now the Main street of Helena, is portrayed a mining scene. Thus was the gold eagerly sought by the placer miners. One old miner is directing the terrific force of a two-inch hydraulic stream. At the head of the sluiceway a second man is forking the heavier rock and a third is cleaning bedrock.

The second picture on the west is "The Rosebud", a scene on Rosebud river above the lake.

The third picture is "Holter Dam", the second largest of the great hydroelectric plants supplying light, power and heat to the residents of the state.

Next is a scene depicting the Indian country near St. Ignatius on the Flathead Indian Reservation, between the Shining Mountains, where Father DeSmet found and taught the Flatheads. The famous Mission range forms the background.

At the north end of the room is found "Lake McDermott". This is a small lake fed by glacial snows, which lies deep in the hollow of the most beautiful mountains in the world, those in Glacier National Park.

Fourth Floor

This floor is used chiefly for balconies and for committee rooms during legislative sessions. It does, however, contain one corner, the extreme northeast, of interest to the visitor, for here is located the G.A.R. room with its souviners and remembrances of the Civil War; its muskets and drum, and last but not least, a silk flag of the revolutionary days showing but thirteen stars, and Montana and all her wonders not even thought of at that time.

This brief description of the Montana State Capitol and paintings was compiled by the Publicity Division of the State Department of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, Helena.

E.G.B.